



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 25
Issue 1 *March*

Article 12

March 1998

Review of *Social Welfare in Global Context*. James Midgley. Reviewed by Cryl Abrahams, University of Calgary.

Cryl Abrahams
University of Calgary

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Welfare Commons, and the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Abrahams, Cryl (1998) "Review of *Social Welfare in Global Context*. James Midgley. Reviewed by Cryl Abrahams, University of Calgary.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 25 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol25/iss1/12>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

Book Reviews

James Midgley, *Social Welfare in Global Context*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. 1997, \$ 52.00 hardcover, \$ 24.95 paper-cover.

James Midgley fills another gap in the International Social Welfare literature with his newest work, *Social Welfare in Global Context*. Clearly addressing the North American market, this work places social welfare in a broader perspective than most North American Social Welfare texts. This work transcends political positioning and provides readers with a range of viewpoints, without obscuring the author's personal outlook. This is unique in a field where the writings are most often laden with ideological rhetoric. The academic breadth of presentation is part of what makes this work so potentially useful as a text.

Midgley's Introduction and Part 1, International Social Welfare and the Global System, most particularly "The Notion of Social Welfare" should be required reading for everyone engaged in the delivery of Social Services. These two pages contextualize social welfare; they remove the image of 'the dole', poverty, and the stigmatization that has hounded welfare since the 50's. They force the reader to think and rethink, to address his or her own value-laden reference regarding welfare, and to expand and refine the use of concept. These two pages set the tone and frame the scope of the work.

Midgley tells the reader, in his preface, that the work is intended as a text for international social welfare. This is far too limiting a prospect. There are portions throughout the book that address issues for everyone in Social Science and Human Service disciplines. Remaining within Part I, International Social Welfare and the Global System, Chapter 2, the Global World System provides an excellent overview of the political and economic development of Nation States. In this Chapter the overall effects of physical or economic conquest, imperialism and ideological missionaries are identified and addressed. Both the process and the ideology of globalization are reviewed; the Chapter ends with the exceptional sentence, "The promotion of international values in social welfare is commendable, but it must be subsumed under

a wider commitment to promote the welfare of people throughout the world". Midgley does not allow the reader to sink back into familiar ideological, North American focused thinking, the global context remains!

Among the five Chapters comprising Part II, the Analysis of International Social Welfare, Chapter 5, Theories of State Welfare, is outstanding. This is the best treatment of the subject available today (including some of Midgley's earlier works). The treatment is comprehensive, coherent, and provides an useful framework. Again, the reader's view is expanded. The earlier Chapters in Part II, Social Conditions in the Global Context and Social Welfare Around the World provide factual overviews, data, and literature summaries that are useful in contextualizing the Theories; but it is the Theories Chapter that captures the reader. The Chapter on the Impact of State Welfare indeed provides an overview, however this topic requires a book of its own. Perhaps Midgley plans to address these critical issues in his next work. The subsequent Chapter regarding the Future sets the stage for the final Part of the book, providing some indications of where the work is going. Midgley leads gently to the future, when perhaps he should have given a more powerful push.

Part III, Applied International Social Welfare is framed within fields of service. Social Work in the International Context comprises education, the profession and the variety of forms within which practice takes place. Midgley refrains from his earlier allegation of the Professional Imperialism of Social Work, but again reminds the reader of the potential for North American imperialism. Midgley's treatment of International Social Development (Chapter 9) addresses Social Development from the traditional macro perspective. It is an excellent overview, but remains at the policy level. The sections involving Strategies for Social Development remain at the conceptual level, and reflect the policy framework of Social Welfare and Social Administration. Another challenge for Midgley's future work could be a more in-depth treatment of implementation strategies for Social Development policies. Midgley's statement "While it is true that efforts to implement social development strategies are faced with formidable difficulties, the desperate conditions of poverty and social deprivation that characterize the lives of hundreds of millions of

people through the world cannot be ignored. Social development is not a magical solution to the world's problems, but it does provide a comprehensive, pragmatic, and workable approach to social welfare that deserves to be more widely adopted." would be echoed by most individuals committed to Social Development.

The final chapter of the work "International Collaboration in Social Welfare" attempts to weave a thread amongst the variety of issues and identify potential fora for collaboration. Midgley limits this portion of his work by framing it within the traditional associations and exchanges. Gently cautioning against unidirectional collaboration, a stronger approach to what can be learned by North Americans and Europeans from our colleagues throughout the world would have been welcome.

This text has many strengths, it is well written, coherent, and does not allow the reader to remain within a narrow, culture bound environment. It is to be recommended to everyone interested in opening his or her vision to Social Welfare in Global Context.

Caryl Abrahams
The University of Calgary

Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
\$ 45.00 hardcover, \$ 17.95 papercover

As conventional wisdom bids farewell to the "era of big government" it is vitally important to have accounts of how such programs actually worked and what they accomplished. The prevailing assumptions are that these programs were 1) directed largely at poor and unfortunate people, 2) conducted by bloated and centralized bureaucracies out of touch with local communities, and 3) resounding failures. Much of the evidence is to the contrary. Gail Radford's study of New Deal housing policy is a major contribution to this historical record.

Radford begins by noting that impetus for government intervention in the housing market came not from New Deal liberals but from bankers and businessmen during the Hoover administration and earlier. What produced this climate was an affordability squeeze wherein the market was able to produce high quality